

FACTORS WHICH MOTIVATED ME TO PRODUCE
AS A WORKING SCULPTOR

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

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By

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Untitled vertical plaster piece	4
2. "Arkansas"	7
3. "Woman"	11
4, a-d. "Movement of Design Through Four Stones . . .	15
5. Three untitled cast cement sculptures	20
6. "The Bather," Picasso, 1975	21

For centuries, artists have gathered their thoughts concerning the creative process and expounded on them. 'If Michelangelo Buonarroti and Leonardo da Vinci had not produced written records of their work, the world would have unfortunately had to rely on secondary information and, today, would not understand why they did what they did. In many ways, their writings even helped to promote the popularity of their work. While an artist may be seemingly too busy and involved with his works to concentrate on supplying explanations of his creations, the present author has determined that allowances should be made for the written interpretation of the artist's motivational forces.

The purpose of this project is to provide a record, much like the ones left to us by Michelangelo and Leonardo, of the personal influences which motivated the present artist to function productively as a sculptor for a period of one semester: from September 1, 1975 through December 12, 1975. The methods involved in charting such artistic transpirations consisted of two types: a written diary, daily recorded, which indicated the progress, regression, frustration, inspiration, and perceptions which were experienced by the artist during the three-month period; and a series of personal, emotional self-enquiries. Data were provided through the diary which answered specific questions pertaining to the artist's mental

and physical states. It is intended that this record, as an essential statement about the artist's works, will not only promote a greater appreciation for the viewer of these works of art but will also cause the artist to introspectively investigate and uncover the sources of his own artistic motivation, noting, too, high and low productivity periods. Such discovery would, undoubtedly, prove useful to the future development of a practicing, professional artist.

The results of my creative enquiry will be presented in the order in which the sculptures were produced, all works being executed in the confines of the North Texas State University Art Department. Initially discussed are the single-piece works, the untitled vertical plaster piece (Fig. 1, p. 4), chronologically followed by the limestone carving entitled "Arkansas" (Fig. 2, p. 7), and the monolithic limestone sculpture, "Woman" (Fig. 3, p. 11). Multiple-piece works consist of four limestone relief tablets, "Movement of Design Through Four Stones" (Fig. 4, p. 15), and three untitled cast cement sculptures (Fig. 5, p. 20). In this attempt to objectify the artist's possible sources of motivation and inspiration, each piece will be discussed in its step-by-step creation process as established by the diary and daily enquiries kept during the three-month period.

My first work, a vertical plaster piece, resulted from my preoccupation with monolithic sculpture. This thought of

monolith sculpture fascinated me ever since the summer of 1975, when I viewed a Picasso creation, "The Bather" (Fig. 6, p. 21), in Chicago at the Gould Plaza. I instinctively knew that the only way to truly experience this type of sculpture was to set it in plaster; therefore, I had established the medium.

As I was pouring a large plaster bat, however, I noticed four large plaster blocks in the rubbish bin. I retrieved them and thought that surely they might be put to use purposefully. My plan soon developed; I decided to stack them as a single, solid piece and then carve into them. When I attempted to stack them, however, I noticed that each block had its own distinctive look and nature (Fig. 1, p. 4). I respected that individuality and preserved it. Accidentally, during this alignment process, an interesting gap between the pieces presented itself; I liked it and continued with the manual handling.

Soon, formal considerations emerged as a result of material reaction. I determined that each block needed to balance one upon another and that the space between objects must be identical throughout. I also felt it necessary to maintain a straight margin on one side and selected which of the surfaces were fronts and backs of the work in order to advance a flow of movement through the piece while simultaneously preserving a relationship between the front and back sides.

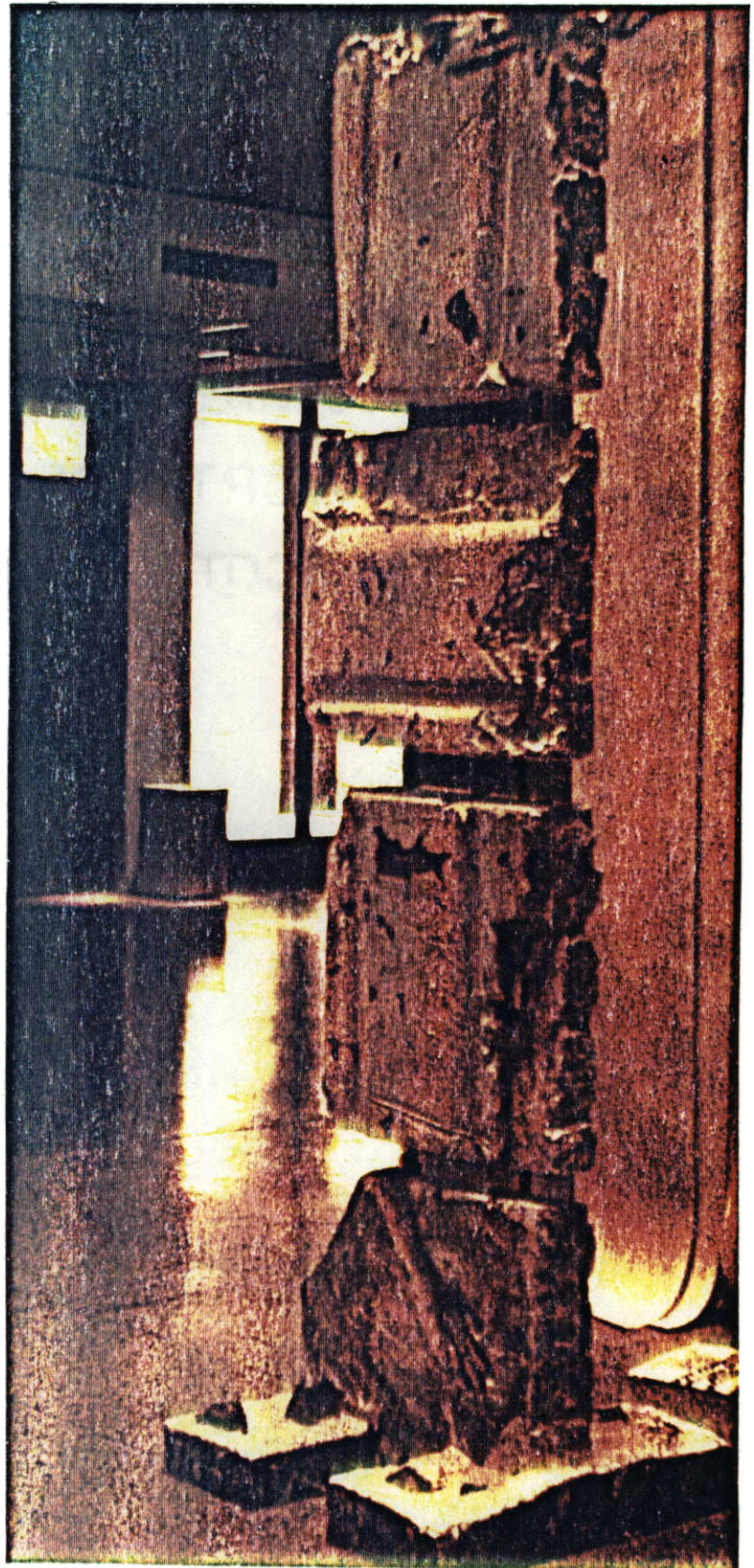


Fig. 1--Untitled
vertical plaster
piece.

As this plaster work finally reached fruition, the very act of creating it, retrospectively, became an unbelievable experience. I felt extremely close to the material, seeing it so very balanced, for I had worked directly with the natural blocks as they had been discovered. I was then confronted with constructing a base for the display of the piece, but eventually ruled against it; my original idea was complete, and that was the important thing.

My next piece, entitled "Arkansas," initially produced little enthusiasm within me. Perhaps my sole reason for beginning it was that I felt compelled to originate another sculpture. I chose this particular stone due to its natural, broken edge and initially attempted to draw on it, but I felt indeed that I was simply repeating a process utilized on my many other carvings; therefore, carving proved slow in the beginning. An alteration in one area naturally caused a change in another area. Always, though, I sought a harmonious design.

All of a sudden, the piece siezed control over the artist. I did nothing but battle it for the next two days. I swore and threw stones at it. At the end of the second day, I felt completely exhausted and frustrated and did not really wish to see the piece again. The following day, while driving my car, I passed a construction highway site, which, to me, represented monolithic sculpture par excellence. It occurred to me that with today's technology, man could produce monuments

the likes of which the world has never seen. This was an exhilarating thought which carried me back to my work area to view that same piece which had fought me the previous night. I soon realized that I had been overly fatigued and did not realize that the piece was truly finished.

I next had to select a base for the sculpture. The base soon emerged, another stone from my supply pile, but it remained an unusual one due to drill holes visible on one side. I used this side as the front, mounting my piece on the selected stone base. The length and width of the base complemented the sculpture perfectly and the drill holes tempted the eye to scan upward into the entire piece (Fig. 2, p. 7).

I then decided to enter the sculpture in a show held at Little Rock, Arkansas; hence the name of the work. The piece still had to be supported, though, so that it would not topple over. I resolved this problem by notching two four-by-fours and lowering the piece into these notches. I remained pleased, feeling that the sculpture appeared to be coherent, but when it returned from the exhibition, I realized just how incomplete it did look; the problem existed in the manner in which the sculpture was presented.

The very day my sculpture returned from Arkansas, I was asked to exhibit the work in the Art Building hallway at North Texas State University. I then tried to hastily create another base for it, but the attempt was futile. In my diary, I recorded:



Fig. 2--"Arkansas"

I'm glad I stopped and told myself 'you mustn't work this way.' A base is all important to a piece, and it must be given as much time and consideration that went into the piece itself. You just cannot be spontaneous without a lot of thought and control; a feel for what's there must be developed. I should never had sent that piece to Little Rock because the presentation wasn't finished. I am becoming fixed in my opinion that the piece must stand by itself as the artist's total statement from the floor up. You lose so much in some pieces when they are placed on a gallery base . . . I was very uptight today when I was hurrying to get that base together. When I settled down, things started to go right. You cannot hurry sculpture; it has to evolve just as a flower blooms. I am beginning to realize these natural forces of sculpture. A sculpture is born and there is a period of pregnancy when the work begins to receive its shape from its parents-nature and the environment. It should not be premature, for then it needs constant attention to keep it alive. A sculpture that is born at the proper time should require nothing to sustain it.

One other experience that I had with this stone needs mention. While transporting the piece home, I dropped and subsequently cracked it. At the time, I was very angry with myself, but soon the fissure did not bother me, for I remembered one of my first sculptures which I also had cracked. I mended the break but left the glue drippings and was as truthful about the situation as I could be. From this experience, I discovered that trying to hide mistakes is so mundane. A person who looks at the piece two hundred years from now will, no doubt, care little about it. The crack, I discovered, is just as strong a statement as the piece itself is because of its own truth; a piece born of itself, then, cannot be damaged but only can thrive by showing its marks of age.

Between finishing the stone carving "Arkansas" and the beginning of the subsequent piece, "Woman," I helped to arrange Larry Bell's exhibition at the Fort Worth Art Museum. Since we removed the showing that preceded Bell's, I was able to see many contemporary California regional works. I especially enjoyed working on Bell's installation piece that was located outside the museum, for it clearly confronted my thoughts concerning monolithic sculpture. I was also fortunate to see sculptures by Alexander Calder, Isamu Naguchi, and Henry Moore. Viewing these creations really only made me wish to return to my own work that much more.

I possessed, at that time, two additional limestone columns which had occupied my thinking for some time. I had no preconceived design in mind for them; I simply wanted to stand them and begin from that point. I levelled the bottom of the larger column, and when I raised it, I knocked over the other column; it broke into four pieces. I swore angrily at myself, but quickly commenced arranging the damaged pieces around the base of the larger column. It seemed to work.

Amazingly, the entire piece emerged in that manner from beginning to end. Strangely enough, the piece actually seemed to create itself. It suggested the right movement to me all along, and all I had to do was listen to it; for instance, the four broken pieces worked so well at the base of the larger column because the column needed an enclosure for its circuit

of energy. The broken pieces naturally provided a perimeter allowing the eyes to move toward, up, and into the column, then allowing them to, once again, return to the base (Fig. 3, p. 11).

At that point, I began to consider the column itself. I realized that there was one, maybe two sides, that was workable, for the remaining areas of the stone were so naturally beautiful that I could not alter them. Such preliminary judgments are much like determining a road map to follow. If I stay on the road, I will be able to be as expressive as I want to within the confines of my ideals. Those first confrontations and considerations with the material, then, are most important. Consequently, with one side free to carve on, I began.

The first thing I did was carve deeply in the upper righthand corner. I wished to polish this area in order to reveal the stone's hidden shine, because I knew there would be few polished surfaces in the final design. I had to retain the monolithic feel of the stone, and surface drawings, I determined, would not disturb this feeling. With the initial penetration, a drawing appeared to support what I had just conjectured; then a series of drawings appeared, all supportive of each other, always done to balance the composition, and all done spontaneously. I, as the artist, cannot think too much about it, for there is a natural feeling which I

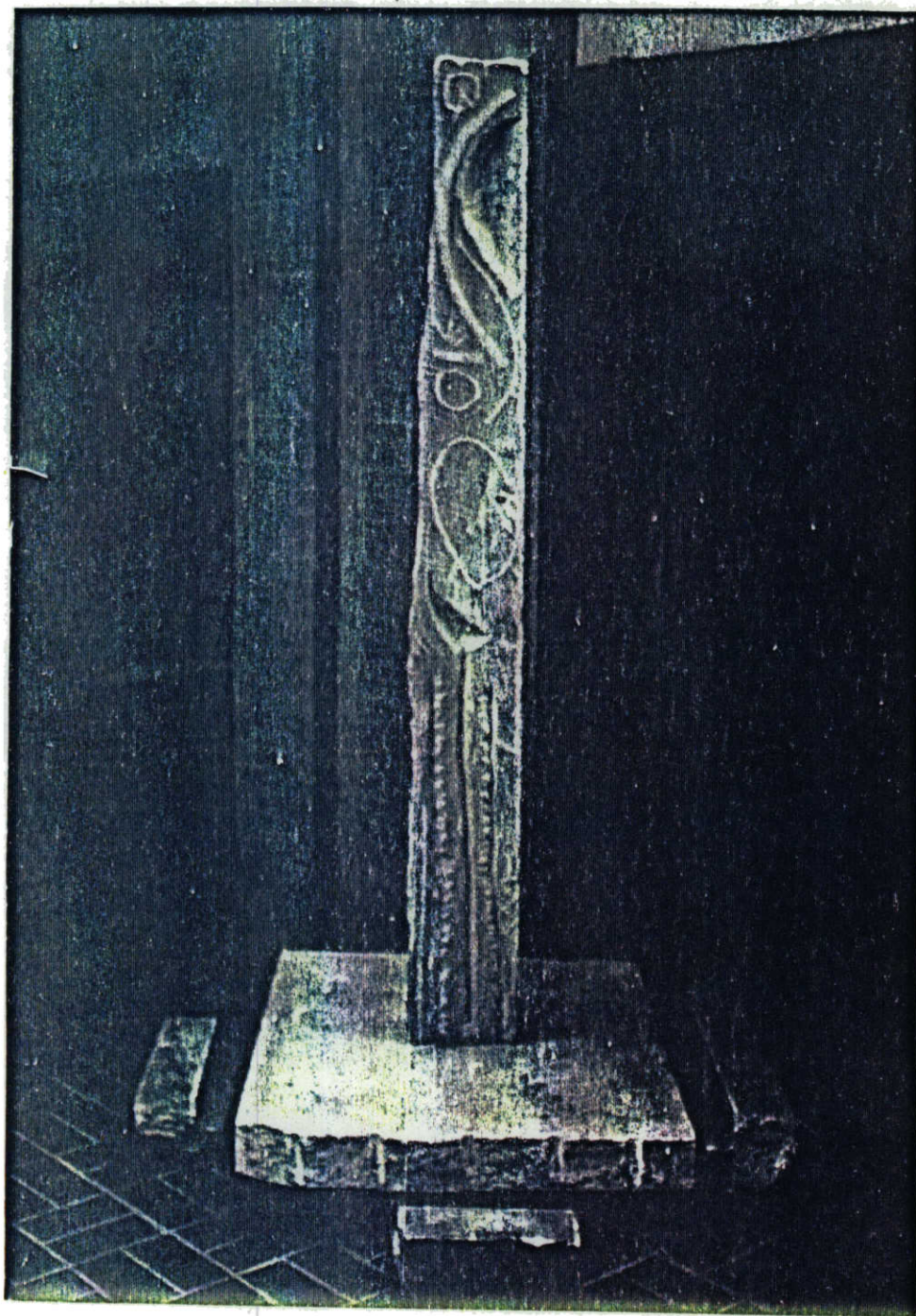


Fig. 3--"Woman"

possess that tells me when to stop. I developed many early perceptions concerning areas of the sculpture as I did about the circular area located in the middle of the stone; nevertheless, I would leave these thoughts when I felt what I had was successful. I worked from the top to the bottom and then went back and filled in areas that I felt needed balancing. The drawing simply built itself. I knew I had many elements concentrated on the top, and I needed to "calm" them in some way. At this point, I picked up the grinder and gouged two vertical lines, adding drawings to support those lines.

In my diary, I wrote that "I thought about what I would do, and then it all happened almost as if I had no control over what I was doing. I felt good when I finished, because I was truthful to myself and to my material. I respected the material so much that we had a close understanding with each other. I know it sounds crazy." I added that the top section's drawings were like balloons that needed to be tethered. Such vertical lines at the base served as the strings.

I was finished with the piece for awhile, because I had a couple of matters to consider: one was the base and the other was whether I should draw on the other flat side of the stone or not. Finally, I chose not to touch the reverse side, for what I wanted to say with the stone had been said, and

anything else would have proven to be frivolous. In any event, extraneous drawing would have damaged the natural presence of the stone.

As for the base, a peculiar thing happened. Just as the broken column had created its own presence, the base, and really the total presentation of the piece, was created by itself. I had been constantly collecting measurements for the base and knew exactly what dimensions of stone I needed. When I found the stone, I cut it to proper length, and with the help of four men, lifted it off the truck and placed it on four-by-four wooden planks so we would not crush our fingers when the stone was situated on the ground. We then raised the column, and I placed the broken stones around it as was planned; however, it just didn't work. I must have puzzled for an hour in an attempt to make the base fit. I felt disgusted with myself, but I then took the broken pieces off the base to view the column alone. It worked.

For that day, I wrote:

There it was--the sculpture. I looked at it, and it was right. The base floating in the air with the broken column at the perimeter and the column in the center of the slab--beautiful. I can't explain when these things happened as they are so natural. I realized what the name of the piece was at that point because it was elevated; I could only think of woman. I then started to see my own graffiti: the egg, legs, and other symbols which speak of woman.

I realized that the four-by-fours underneath the piece had to be presented just as effectively as the stone itself,

so I joined them and left one side loose so that I would have access to the bolt under the piece which affixed the column to the base. My other consideration was the signature. I knew there was only one side of the base on which I could put it. I decided to sign the back of the base to balance the activity that was continuing on the front. It worked well, and was in total harmony with the entire piece. I consider "Woman" to be one of my most successful sculptures for the simple reason that it was created so naturally.

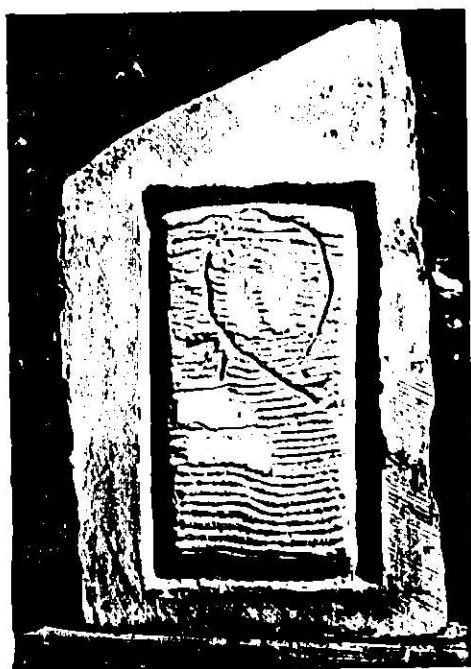
I worked on my tablets, "Movement of Design Through Four Stones" (Fig. 4, p. 15), periodically during the entire semester as I did with the majority of my pieces. I prepared my sculptures to a stage that I felt confident with, and would then begin something else. Working in that manner, I found that no one work ever became tiresome.

When I gathered these tablets at the stoneyard, the idea I had was to assemble them in a vertical design, thinking of what I had previously done with the plaster blocks. The morning that I first looked at these, however, they already had an inherently beautiful design; consequently, all other ideas were abandoned. I commenced work, again letting the material dictate to me. I approached the carving process differently, though.

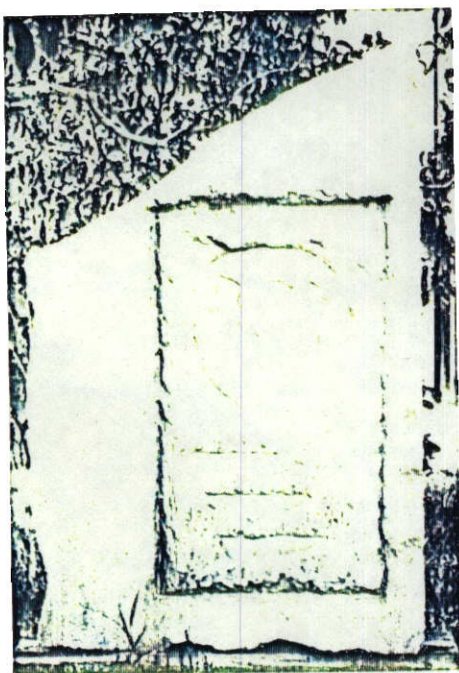
At that point, my log explained that "I have a preconceived idea of how I will carve these. I know I will pass



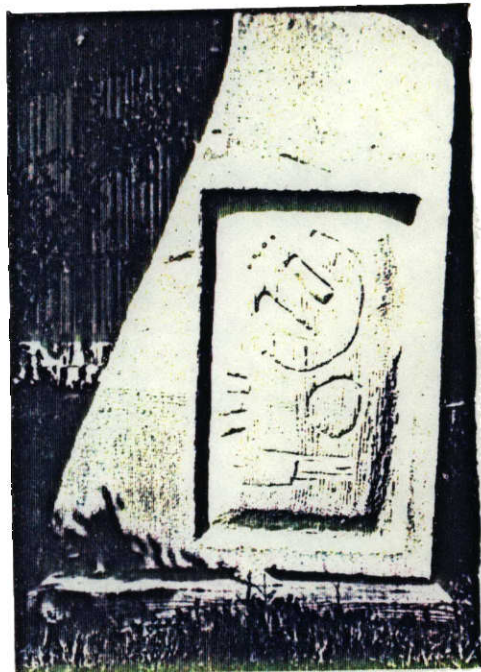
a



b



c



d

Fig. 4, a-d--"Movement of Design Through Four Stones"

many beautiful things on the way, but I have to go on with that idea; it's a good experience. I am going to command the stone."

The artist learns quickly that he never really commands the stone, but the present sculptor wished to see if he could proceed with an idea and follow it through to the end. Formal considerations were being laid--I knew in which order the stones had to be arranged and that the designs all had to be contained within the rectilinear shape to insure congruency. All the reliefs would remain on the same level and the end result would be the desired movement of design through four stones. The only difference, though, was that instead of attacking the stone freely and spontaneously I was going to remain with the design I had conceived in my mind and not wander from it. After three days of sheer frustration, I relented, and allowed my design to flow naturally.

Once again, my diary attempted to rationalize the situation.

I cannot do this preconceived project. I tried and could not. I was smoothing it and smoothing it and finally let loose. I still kept the original idea though, of the line and dot, but I cannot keep it as tightly as planned. I felt so good when I became free once again; I cannot deny my inner feelings. I was so excited that I began working on all four stones at once.

I was truthful; I had tried it the other way and discovered that I could not do a totally pre-planned piece.

The first area I attacked was the hard edge of the initial tablet. As soon as I broke down the barrier between nature and my design, everything flowed. I prepared each stone's surface as a painter would prepare his canvases. As he would use gesso, I would use textures. My writings revealed "how the sculpture changes every day, but I believe that the tablets can be totally individualistic yet joined through a family resemblance or trait; now, to pull this off will be exciting." Each tablet required a direct link to the ones that preceded it.

The third tablet did not materialize as easily as the first two did. The log reads that "I had to constantly look at what I did on my first two tablets. The stone, however, has its own personality that one must respect and use. The stone speaks things, and the artist has to let them be heard." The following day, I recorded that "I completely changed my third flat. I am much more satisfied with it now; it is a lot more congruent with the others." I completed the three flats that evening and felt satisfied with them.

The next day, though, I related that "I came upon my flats late in the afternoon and felt like throwing them all out." For some reason, I just did not like them any more. I thought they were not saying enough. The only way I could rescue them was through my fourth flat. I sketched on the stone what I thought might be the design but realized I was not ready to begin carving that stone yet; consequently, I

left all my tablets for about six weeks. When I returned, I wrote that "I thought and thought about the fourth tablet, about how it had to be the mother of the other three. I thought some more, and then I looked at the different backgrounds of each of the other tablets and knew where I needed to start."

I then began with the bushing hammer in the upper right-hand corner, soon realizing that I just had to commit myself instead of thinking so much. While adding the bushing texture, I enlarged the motif that was in the lower left-hand corner to give the stone continuity with the second tablet. I then constructed the open circle at the top and placed a closed circle under it. Next came some bushing texture in the lower left-hand corner to balance the composition. I then entered the other two motifs that were taken from tablets one and three into the open circle. I continued by adding four lines on the left-hand side and four dots to close the circle in order to remind the viewer this was the fourth tablet in the series. I then had to add three dots at the bottom to support the ones located at the top. I was finished.

My original idea was to present the tablets on a table of stone or cement, placed on a small rise or hill. I found two cement columns one day that could easily have acted as the legs for the table, but I did not have the equipment or the time to attempt this. Instead, I presented them at eye

level by choosing an elevated section of landscape. I was very satisfied with this piece because I achieved the movement through the stones that I had desired while assuring each stone's individuality.

The final pieces I constructed were the cast cement sculptures (Fig. 5, p. 20). These were directly influenced by the Picasso sculpture, "The Bather" (Fig. 6, p. 21), which also was composed of cast cement. I attempted to proceed with cardboard models as Picasso had done. Picasso had only constructed small cardboard models of this piece, and it wasn't until after his death that these works were made monumental. All of my concern, then, focused directly on the cardboard models themselves in an attempt to preserve that expression in cement.

This process involved much research and experimentation with types, colors, and consistencies of cement mediums. I painstakingly attempted to lift the exact design from the cardboard and transfer them to my molds. In constructing the molds, I was concerned totally with the negative space which the cement would fill. I probably could never have constructed these molds without my intensive study of the building and design of commercial molds. The designing and building of such molds claimed most of the time, and when they were completed, it was remarked that they were very strong sculpturally themselves. I did, in fact, regard them as architectural models in one setting.

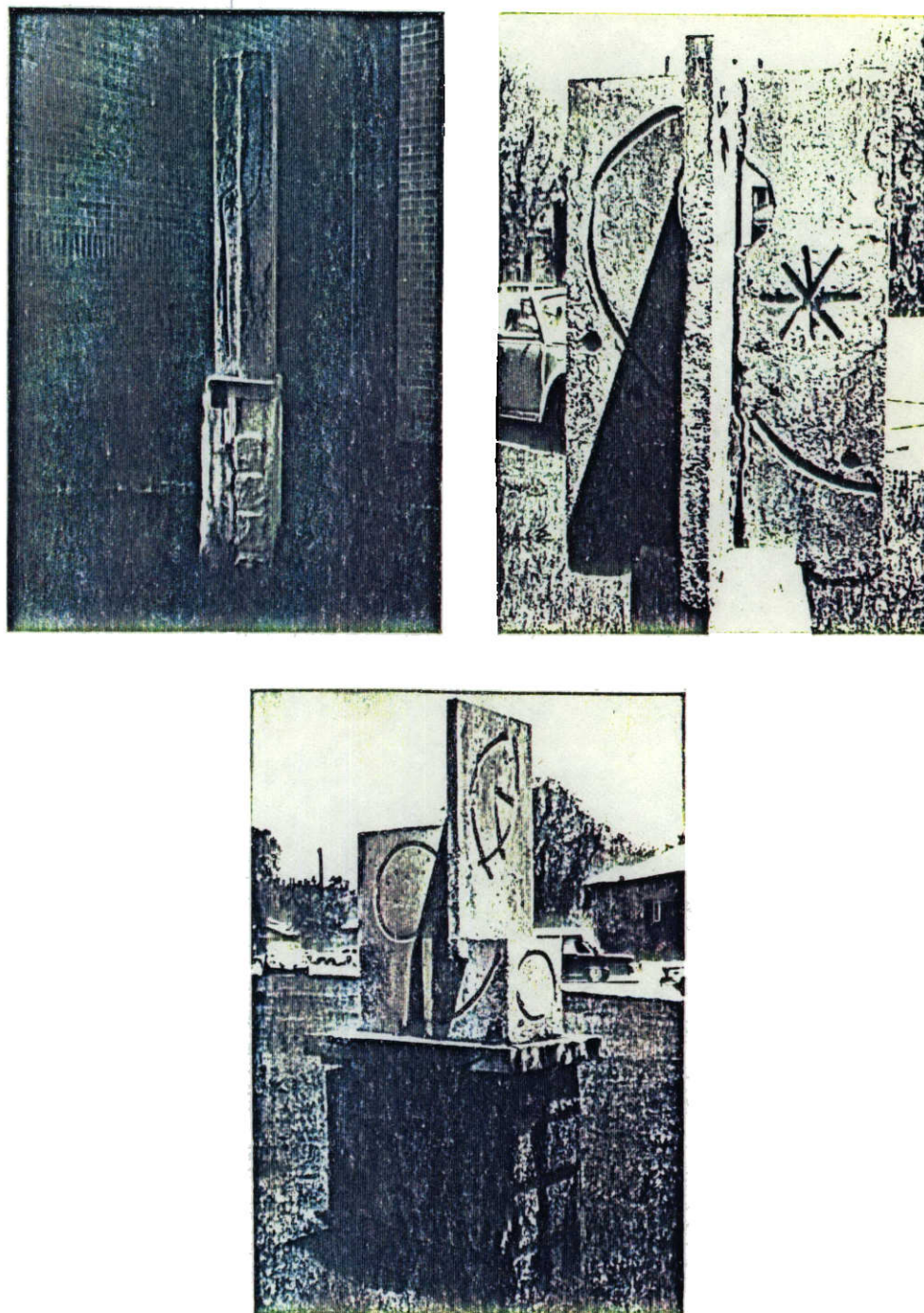


Fig. 5--Three untitled case cement sculptures

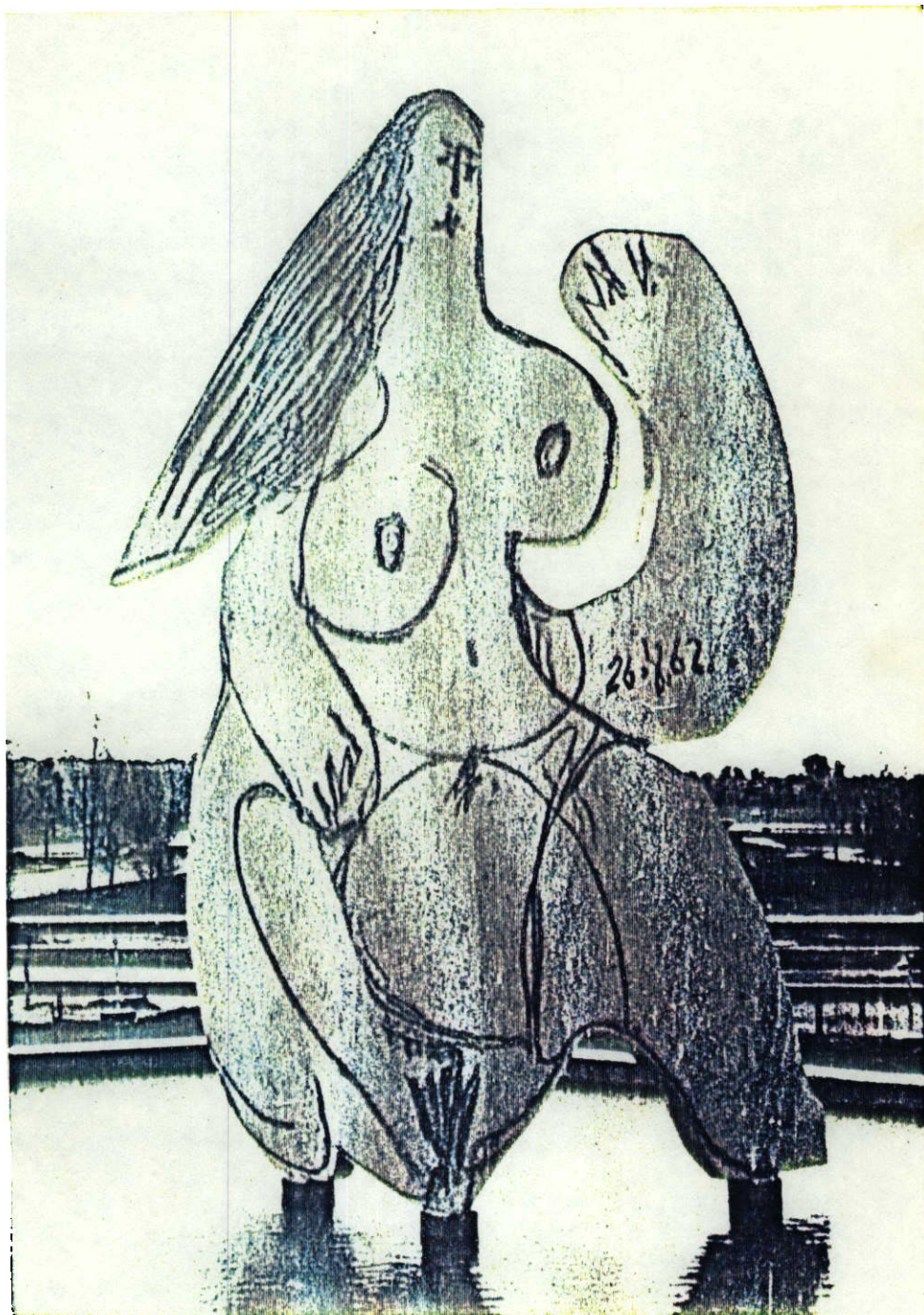


Fig. 6--"The Bather," Picasso, 1975.

The steel armature also became sculptural to me, but all were means to an end. This had to be the most indirect process of making sculpture I have ever experienced. The artist constantly deals with materials, but is never confronted with the material of the finished piece until he is ready to pour the cement. It was very frustrating to be unable to see the finished piece evolve as in a stone carving, but it was a form of artistic discipline for me.

The cement itself was an amazing medium for me to study and work with, as it is a material that gains strength with age. Mixing and pouring the cement was a very physical experience, and I felt very close to the medium, much as I do in stone carving. In observing each of the three pieces after they emerged from the mold, I did not really know how to react to them. I knew I liked them, but the results were somewhat disappointing. Nevertheless, I admired the texture and appreciated the fissures that I had created by accident and felt comfortable with them. These, as all my works, were statements issued by a man, and I loved how honest they were; therefore, I decided to keep them and work with them. I felt if I returned to pour a successful, perfect casting, it would mean little. I would actually be regressing instead of personally progressing in my exploration of ideas and search for meaning.

There were numerous times when I would be afraid to view my piece, afraid that the piece itself would just not work. That would be admitting that I had just been kidding myself all along. Each time I looked, however, there was something to support what I believed in. I was completely truthful and honest in my handling of the material, and that satisfied me. Perhaps the most trying part of composition proved itself in the selection of a base. When in fact it had been chosen, the base became an essential part of the piece itself. With the base chosen, I placed my piece on top of it and considered the total composition.

When bolting the sculpture together, I had to make certain that I did not disturb how the piece rested. The base and the piece itself must work harmoniously to achieve the total artistic statement. Similar considerations were made for my other pieces as well.

One final point to consider is the importance of the surface designs. Just as my attention and all my energy went into placing the designs on the cardboard models, and transferring them to my molds, so attention was also given to the position of sunlight on my pieces, which enabled the designs, on the surface, to be seen and fully appreciated; in fact, the only time the vertical piece is entirely successful is in the late afternoon when the design is clearly seen. At all other times, the base is simply too overpowering for the piece.

On my crossing piece, the sculpture never remains the same. Shadow and light caused by the sun constantly creates movement through the piece. In my third piece, I purposely located it where I did because the sun would activate it most around the noon hour, the time most people would be passing it.

After reviewing my works and writings, I have concluded that many things influenced my work each day. Although I believe the major influence on my thought of monolithic sculpture had to be the Picasso piece viewed in Chicago, I have concluded that really any major work must have had impact on me; for example, the scale of the Naguci or the Calder works, or the environmental atmosphere created by Phillip Johnson. Everything has influenced me, even a drive down the road in a flatbed truck suddenly became a play of rhythm for me. All these visual experiences influenced me, but what motivated me most to produce the aforementioned works can be reduced to one thing--my materials. Environmental and personal influences were minimal compared to how the materials and my relationship with them affected my production. I could produce in a congested area or in a quiet area; it didn't matter if it rained or the sun shined. People could be around me, or I could be left alone. It was the constant battle with my materials and how those materials acted or reacted that motivated me. I believe that my experiences and my observation

of my surroundings supported my thoughts, but it became the confrontation with the materials which provided the creative catalyst. All outside considerations would be forgotten; I simply allowed the materials to dictate to me what they required.

Respecting each piece of material I picked up, I realized that it had its own nature and its own natural way that it had to be used. If the artist were close enough to the material, it would motivate him to use it in the manner he instinctively knew was right. In conclusion, it is my belief that this search of what factors motivated me to produce as a working sculptor has promoted a better understanding of my work, for I believe such an understanding brings appreciation and produces satisfying creative experiences for the artist.